

THOUGHT vs. MEMORY in EDUCATION.

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The vital relationship which a nation's system of education holds to its advancement and stability of civilization is self-evident and needs no exemplification to establish its importance. The problem for the present and coming educators is to establish and maintain a rational and conservative system of education whereby none of the natural powers will be developed to the detriment of those which are of equal or of greater importance.

Greece has furnished us an example of the evil effects of educating the physical powers at the expense of those more vital. India educates the higher caste while the masses grope in the darkness of their religious superstition. Rome is an example of the results of educating for the state at the expense of the individual. China, by enclosing herself within a wall and failing to detect and remedy her tendency to retrogression, is now reaping the results - ignorance, depravity and famine. From this review of the history of education, it would seem that these phenomena can be attributed to nothing more nor less than a wrong ideal as the goal of education.

This being true, it behooves our modern educators who are so vitally connected with the welfare of our nation and of society, to scrutinize closely our system of education with the idea of eliminating any evil tendency and establishing methods which are more conducive to intellectual growth and the development of character.

The great danger which is threatening our present system of education is the tendency toward one-sidedness in placing too much value upon memory at the expense of those more important faculties

involved in the process of thought.

The root of the problem is not far to seek. In developing a system of education the fixing and maintaining of a certain standard is the essential thing to be considered.

Practically all institutions of learning eliminate, by means of examinations, those students not coming up to a certain standard.

The method of testing a student's knowledge of a subject by a written examination has so long been in vogue that it has become universal in its application, and is in many cases used as the sole means of grading. This custom has, in consequence, created a great demand for memory. Memory indeed has a place in education. In fact, it is indispensable in all intellectual processes, and should be trained and developed accordingly. However, there is danger of memory being allowed to assume the chief role, and other faculties of more importance being made auxiliary to it.

The importance of memory as bearing on the elementary principles of education can scarcely be over-estimated. The whole system of education may be said to depend upon the subject of memory. Memory is of vital importance, not only purely in an intellectual sense, but also the development of the senses and the training of the physical powers are directly dependent upon it. The first step in all training, culture and education, depends entirely upon memory, and even the law of habit might well be called a second cousin to it.

There is no question, then as to the vital relationship which memory bears to education, but it is simply a question as to the amount of memory-cultivation which should be encouraged in the higher institutions of learning.

It is simply a matter of fact exemplified in many instances

that memory pure and simple, of a mechanical or statistical nature has a deadening effect upon the intellect and also weakens one's power of observation. There is also danger of an over-active memory dulling the imagination and will power, thus stagnating the faculties of production, while improving those of reproduction.

Under the weight of prescribed forms and the sway of memory, individuality and self-activity is often crushed out of the student, yielding him up to the influence of external authority. The evils of extreme memory culture are very strikingly exemplified in the Chinese education, where there is so much to be memorized in mastering the elementary principles of the language that by the time this^{is} accomplished, all inspiration and tendency to thought-production or invention has degenerated into a mere mechanical function. Chinese education fills the mind of the youth so full of maxims of Mencius and Confucius that the individual soon sacrifices all freedom and gives himself up to a long established custom of memorizing.

While the present system of education in our American colleges and universities is not to be compared with that of China, yet it is a serious question - whether memory work is not too strongly emphasized.

The so-called examinations which are tolerated for the purpose of classifying students and of maintaining a standard among them is perhaps responsible for the extreme value given to memory-culture. "Real teaching" (says one author), meaning by this the evolution of thought and the training of its expression, does not aim at the memorizing of disconnected facts. Real teaching leads to systematic, symmetrical, all-sided upbuilding of a compact body of knowl-

edge. Every faculty of the mind, including perception, judgement, classification, reason, imagination and memory, is brought into action in this up-building of knowledge." This being true, it is the business of examinations to test the progress of the intellect in its development. Notwithstanding this however, examinations often test merely the student's ability to memorize disconnected facts. Here, then, since examinations are necessary, can be seen the importance of skill in the art of questioning.

One author, in his theory of examinations, makes a clear distinction between examinations as a test of how many dry facts the pupil can remember, and examinations as a test of the results of his efforts to assimilate knowledge. No doubt many students fail in their examinations because the questions are framed with the idea of finding how much he does not know; they call for dry facts or details which the pupil is unable to draw from out the "fringe" of his consciousness.

In judging pupils by examinations, perhaps the most objectionable feature is, that their abilities do not run along the same line and notwithstanding which fact, no discrimination is made between the pupils. The pupil having the better memory and better expression of thought, answers perhaps, every question within the prescribed time, while the other pupil, who is perhaps deficient in these faculties, is not finished when the time is up and he scores a failure. Yet, it may be, the latter is the stronger scholar of the two. He is perhaps a stronger thinker, displacing more determination in attacking the difficult problems of life, and being less easily discouraged by seeming failures.

Another weakness of examinations is that they often ask for a discussion of ^(any) important questions, assuming that if the important things are known, the more important must be known. This method, no doubt, encourages a kind of study that does not accomplish the end it should. The object of study should be to arrive at general notions, and fasten upon the more important things. In examinations of teachers for the purpose of deciding upon their fitness to teach are often found such absurd questions as those involving the height of mountains, the number slain in battles, the location of capes, the solution of mathematical problems not applicable to commercial life, the analysis of a grammatically incorrect sentence - all these constitute a type of questions often found in a teacher's examination, and which are supposed to test her qualifications as a teacher.

Where examinations are made the end of study, the text-book becomes magnified and originality is at a discount. In such examinations no estimate is placed upon broad scholarship which acquires knowledge for its own sake, nor upon that far-reaching exercise of the mind which goes beyond the minute details to grasp the more fundamental ideas.

Dickens plainly saw and strenuously denounced the evils of the cramming system in England, and many of his characters are presented to show the evil effects of the cramming method.

An eminent educator has said "When in schools, colleges and universities, instructors learn a better way to promote rank and classify pupils than by examination, then, and not till then, will cramming be abolished." All processes, then, should be rejected which do not educate from within outward.

Great pains should be taken in arranging questions for examinations. For even ^(at best) proficiency is largely a matter of memory and often such memory is best developed by those who do the least real thinking. Examination questions should always be of such a nature as to provoke thought.

The end of education is the development of principles rather than mere isolated facts. This does not mean, however, that these general notions are not to be reached by the solution of individual problems of a concrete nature. The culture of thought, or the power to grasp principles then, would seem the chief aim of education. By this is meant the power of comparing, assorting and arranging our fund of concrete ideas, thus classifying them according to their agreements and differences and grasping the truths revealed by them.

It is only by the power of thought that one is able to infer that what is true in a given case is likely to be true in a similar case, and thus profit by experience. It is thought that enables us to reap the benefits of our successes and failures. It is thought that makes possible all the advancement of invention, science and art, that brings natural resources into the service of man, and contrives all the developing agents of civilization.

The development of thought, then, and not memory, should be made the goal of education.